

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Masao Uyehara

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Masao Uyehara was born in 1916 in Kohala, Hawai'i to Okinawan immigrants Taro and Kamado Uyehara. At the age of one, he was taken back to Oroku, Okinawa.

Returning to Hawai'i at the age of eleven, Masao Uyehara faced the challenges of attending public schools in Papāikou and Pi'ihonua. At the age of fourteen or fifteen, with hopes of being a schoolboy –part-time worker and student -- he left the Big Island for Honolulu.

Due to the depression, he had no choice but to work. With the help of Gentaro Kaneshiro he was able to land a non-paying job as dishwasher at American Café. With the free food, dishwashing allowed Masao Uyehara to survive and learn a skill. Again, with the help of Gentaro Kaneshiro, Uyehara later got a paying job as dishwasher at Kewalo Inn where he washed dishes, did pantry work, helped the cook, and baked. In 1934, he was asked to be a cook at Kapi'olani Grill.

In 1940, he and his brother, Kotaro Uyehara, bought Lindy's Café. There, Masao worked as cook. In 1954, Masao Uyehara left Lindy's and took over Silver Surf Fountain which he ran until he retired in 1970.

Masao Uyehara and his wife, Asae, who also helped doing a variety of tasks at Lindy's and Silver Surf, reside in Honolulu.

Tape No. 40-15-1-02

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Masao Uyehara (MU)

Honolulu, O'ahu

October 17, 2002

BY: Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto (MK)

[NOTE: Also present at the interview is Asae Uyehara (AU), MU's wife.]

MK: This is an interview with Mr. Masao Uyehara at his home in Honolulu, O'ahu on October 17, 2002. The interviewer is Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto.

Okay, so I'm going to start the interview now and the first question I have is, Mr. Uyehara, when were you born?

MU: Nineteen sixteen.

MK: And where were you born?

MU: In Kohala, Hawai'i.

MK: What was your father's name?

MU: Taro Uyehara.

MK: And your mother's name?

MU: Kamado Uyehara.

AU: No, Kamado Takara. Maiden name.

MU: Oh, maiden name, Takara, yeah. Kamado Takara.

MK: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

MU: I had one brother and three sisters.

MK: What number child were you?

MU: Last.

MK: Last one. Tell me the story about why your—maybe you can explain to me what was written in your grandson's paper about your mother and father and what happened to the

first son and everything.

MU: My father had three children in Okinawa. My father came to Hawai'i to make money. So the [MU's father's] first son died when he was nine years old, something like that. So, in Okinawa style, they need *chōnan* for take over the family, so she [MU's mother] came to Hawai'i. She stay here I don't know how long, but get two boys, one girl, and went back to Okinawa.

MK: And then, when you were one year old, what happened to you? You were taken back to Okinawa?

MU: Yeah, one year old, they take me back to Okinawa because we get two sisters at home. I lived there for eleven years, went school over there.

MK: And when your mother took you back to Okinawa, who else did she take back to Okinawa?

MU: (One sister) and brother, my mother, yeah, took them back.

MK: Where did you folks go back to in Okinawa?

MU: Oroku.

MK: Try describe for me what Oroku was like when you were a child.

MU: Oh, it's nice place next to Naha, right next, in walking distance to Naha. So, I think it's good place. That's what I think.

MK: What kind of house did you live in?

MU: Grass house. We live in grass house.

MK: You mentioned that you went to school in Oroku, try and tell me what you remember about going to school in Oroku.

MU: Hard to get that kind of memory. (Chuckles) I enjoyed going school.

MK: What subject did you like the most at Oroku?

MU: Nothing special. All was average, not the high, middle—I was average student. I didn't get scolding from the teacher.

(Laughter)

You know, some fellas get scolding.

MK: How were the teachers in Oroku? *Donna kata datta no?*

MU: Oh, you doing the right thing, so teacher's always good to you.

MK: You were in Oroku from one-year-old to eleven, yeah?

MU: Yeah.

MK: During that time, *jūnen* time, how much contact did your family have with your father in Hawai'i?

MU: That, I don't know, too young to know.

MK: I know that at age eleven, you were brought back to Hawai'i.

MU: Back to Hawai'i, yeah.

MK: How come?

MU: Because Hawai'i is better life, that's what Mother think. Okinawa, you don't have job. America is a great country, so you get better life you living in America because she know about Hawai'i. So, she send me to the Father them place.

MK: Who came back when you were eleven?

MU: My brother was two years ahead. So after two years, myself, I came back.

MK: Who traveled with you?

MU: Our relation with us, hard to tell, but this Wally's wife's father, brought me over here together with them. He *wen* go see Japan, so.

MK: So that's Wallace Teruya's wife's father brought you back.

MU: Yeah, because he was coming back. He *wen* be Okinawa, so he got to come back, he brought me together with him.

MK: How did you feel at that time about coming back to Hawai'i?

MU: I was happy (chuckles). But, after that. . . .

AU: I think you said you didn't recognize your father at the meeting.

MU: One year old [when MU last saw his father]. I didn't recognize my father because I asked the brother, "Which is my father?" You know what I mean? We stay in immigration place, you know immigration.

MK: Immigration Bureau?

MU: Yeah, for ten days. Because my father got to come up from [island of] Hawai'i. He was living Hawai'i. When they came—my brother was Honolulu only because he was doing school boy and going school over here. So they came to immigration, come pick me up, I ask my brother, "Which is my [father]?" Because he [MU's father] came with other two, three men together. Not only my father and brother, because other two guys.

MK: So you didn't recognize your father because you didn't see him for ten years, and he came with two, three other men.

MU: Yeah, come pick me up.

MK: You mentioned that your oldest brother, that would be (Kotaro)?

- MU: Mm. (Kotaro).
- MK: He had come back two years earlier and he was working as a school boy.
- MU: Yeah, and going to school.
- MK: So where was (Kotaro) working that time when you came back?
- MU: He was going school.
- MK: Going school.
- MU: Yeah, because as school boy, you clean the yard, help them, and you get free room and you go school, see.
- MK: So he was living at a *Haole* person's house cleaning the yard, help them, and he was going school. What school was (Kotaro) going?
- MU: I don't know which school.
- MK: And then so, you came back to Hawai'i, and your father took you back to the Big Island?
- MU: Yeah.
- MK: And when you went back to the Big Island, what did you think, first impression, what did you think?
- MU: Well, I never think—in Okinawa we get hard time, too, only my mother working. So, we came over here, next Sunday he take me *holehole*, you know, eleven-years-old, *holehole*. You know, cut—that's why, I just listen to them, do what they say.
- MK: When you went back, where was your father living?
- MU: Pāpa'ikou, Kalawa.
- MK: Kalawa in Pāpa'ikou? And what kind of work was your father doing?
- MU: Cane field. It's all cane field; cut cane, *hō hana*, all kind to bring the cane up, that's why, the job.
- MK: When you came back, who was living with your father?
- MU: Nobody.
- MK: Just your . . .
- MU: My father.
- MK: Because you were only eleven years old when you came back, what happened to you with school?
- MU: School? My father take me school and I went go school from then on every time. But, we cannot get the English faster because I cannot talk English, I cannot get friend. Come

home, your father talk Okinawa or Japanese to me. In fact, Okinawa, they still talk because my father never go Japanese school. You know what I mean?

MK: Yeah, yeah.

MU: So, I didn't improve the language because that time if you get friend, you get brother or somebody home—Hawai'i-born—and then they talk English, well, you can talk. But, nobody home. So, you no can get friend because they no understand Japanese. That's the reason, cannot, hard to improve the language.

MK: So in the beginning, what school did your father take you to?

MU: Pāpa'ikou School.

MK: And then what grade did you start off in?

MU: Kindergarten. Eleven-year-old in kindergarten is tough, but—because I don't know nothing.

MK: You started kindergarten, but later on, what did they do?

MU: After, I went from about January, I think. I went about three or four months in the first grade, I didn't end. June end. After that, I went to second grade. Jump me second grade because I know English, that's the reason they send. After three or four months, send me to fifth grade. I finish fifth grade, and then my father went Japan. So, he take me to Pi'ihonua, uncle place. From that I went—after fifth grade, I went to sixth grade over there. I was going come down here, Honolulu, go school. But, 1930–31 depression period. We get hard time to survive. So, I got to look [for work]. What I can do, I don't have education, I don't have strength, and still fifteen years old. So what I can do is try dishwasher boy. So, Gentaro Kaneshiro take me to American Café for free dishwasher, learning dishwasher.

MK: How did you come to Honolulu though?

MU: At that time, my father came back from Okinawa, bring the sister back. So, he was living over here.

MK: Okay. So your father brought back your sister from Okinawa?

MU: Yeah, yeah.

MK: And they were living in Honolulu?

MU: Yeah, but my father no more job, too. So my sister working for *Haole* house, seven dollars a week or eight dollars a week, I don't know. But we survive with that. So, my father struggling, I see that, but I no can do nothing. Free dishwasher, I learn how to dishwash dish. I went go American Café, free dishwasher. But sometimes they give me five dollar week, some time they no give, but I get free food. That's the main thing, free food.

MK: How did you know Gentaro Kaneshiro?

MU: The wife *Otome-san*, Yuki's sister that, we some kind of relation in Okinawa. Back and

forth the house, before, small time. That's why we know Yuki [Takara] well, too, Howard's father.

MK: Oh, okay. Gentaro Kaneshiro's wife, Otome-san, is a relation to you.

MU: Yeah, so I know Gentaro well. That's why Gentaro know me. That's why, take me into American Café dishwasher. So I learn how to dishwash when I was fifteen years old.

MK: So this American Café's owner was Ushi Takara, *ne*?

MU: Yeah.

MK: Those days when you were *minarai no* dishwasher, who was working over there?

MU: Well, the Hawaiian Café, Kina Takara. Hawaiian Café. Ushinosuke Takara, he had restaurant someplace. I don't know, I forgot the name of that. Gentaro was waiter. Kotaro Takara, too, but he went to Mainland, so I don't know what happened to him. But a lot of people, they're not living in this world now.

MK: And so, this American Café that you were washing dishes at, where was it located?

MU: King Street, next door [Alexander] Young Hotel.

MK: What else was near American Café, that neighborhood? Young Hotel, American Café.

MU: Young Hotel, that's all I know because Young Hotel is tall. And then, after that Times Supermarket, [owners] bought across the street. I call them Takeo, Takeshi, because we work together. In 1931 we work together, I never call the English name, I don't know the English name. I know Takeshi and Takeo because we work together. Now they call Wally and Albert, I use that. But sometime. . . .

MK: You went with their Japanese names, yeah. This American Café, what kind of food did they serve?

MU: American food. I guess so, I dishwasher, I don't know what they cooking. (AU and MK laugh.) I don't know what they cook because I'm only learning how to dishwasher, that's my job.

MK: Because you were in the back washing dishes, did you notice what kind of customers they had those days?

MU: No, I don't know nothing. Maybe local people. Young Hotel get plenty *Haole* working.

MK: Those days, you were *minarai* so no pay.

MU: Yeah, no pay. They used to pay sometimes.

MK: Sometimes.

MU: Five dollar a week.

MK: And then they fed you, though. They gave you food.

MU: Yeah, free food.

MK: What kind of meals did they give you?

MU: I don't remember. I don't care, anything I eat. I'm not the type. Yeah, as long as I fill up with rice, that's all. Because when I was Hawai'i *shima*, I eat every day *udon* and rice. *Udon* soup and rice because the store is so far, you no more choice. You live with the father, no more choice, get *udon* and rice every day. *Udon* soup kind, I'm talking about.

MK: So when you went to American Café, you had your meals and sometimes you have pay. And what were your hours? How long did you have to work?

MU: That, I forgot.

MK: How long did you stay American Café?

MU: Maybe three or four months, I think.

MK: And then what happened to you?

MU: I looking for job. Emma Street, get the employment office Emma Street, you know, there. So one day, my friend tell me, "Hey Masa, I get job." The guy came from Okinawa, too, I know him. So, "I get job. I go Kewalo Inn. We go." Interview. "You like go?" Okay, then I went. I know where, now. So, he got the job. One New Year, so busy they opening about ten o'clock, I don't know what time, that time. And the dishwasher drunk New Year Day, he no come over. So, next day he get fired. You know that time is real strict, the boss is boss you know. He get fired. So they called up . . .

MK: The employment office.

MU: Employment office. So, the man told me "You like go?" Okay, they get dishwasher open. So he told me Kewalo Inn. (Laughs) I know. So quick I go see Gentaro, I get a job. Gentaro told me, "I know him, I go call him up." He called him up saying I want the job. So, Gentaro know Uehara because Okinawa sumo time, they used to take sumo together. Uehara is sumo yeah, that's why, I know certain kind occasion. So they know each other. "Hey, okay go." He tell me. Gentaro said I get the job, go. I went over there, I get the job. Young, but I get experience, he hire me.

MK: And then, the man that was fired, was he your friend?

MU: No.

MK: That was a separate guy.

MU: Uehara got to be okay, the boss got to be okay. They hire, so I stay over there.

MK: This Harry Uehara, what did he do in the restaurant? He's the owner, what did he do?

MU: He boss only.

MK: Just boss.

MU: Yeah, he get cashier, watch the waitress, serve right food, yeah. He was really strict. I

learn a lot of things from over there, strict to take care the customer first. He was really good. That's why he was success. Way back 1931, '32, he's the busiest place, Kewalo Inn.

MK: Those days, your job was dishwasher over there. What other people were working at Kewalo Inn those days? You were the dishwasher. Maybe if we look at the picture. So, 1932 at Kewalo Inn, try tell me who were working there looking at this picture.

MU: This the cook. This cook, this waitress, this all the waitress. This is the wife, see.

MK: So, the cook's name was . . .

MU: This the waiter, I think.

MK: Waiter is Jack. Wallace Teruya was a waiter. This man is . . .

MU: Chef.

MK: Higa, he was the chef. What is his first name?

MU: I don't remember.

MK: The next one is Albert Teruya, he was a waiter.

MU: No, he was *da kine*, cook.

MK: He was a cook? Albert Teruya was a cook. Then, next is you. You were the dishwasher that time. And then next to you is . . .

MU: Cook.

MK: A cook.

MU: Yeah. He's a cook, too.

MK: And then this person is Gushiken.

MU: Yeah, Gushiken.

MK: He was a cook, and then in the front row you have Mitsue-san.

MU: Yeah, that's the sister of . . .

MK: Of Mrs. Uehara. And Mitsue-san did what kind of work?

MU: Waitress. All waitress over there.

MK: Kiyoko was a . . .

MU: Waitress.

MK: Was she a relative, too?

- MU: No, I don't think so.
- MK: And then, Mrs. Uehara, what was her job?
- MU: Pantry boy, make salad, that's the job she did.
- MK: She did the pantry work. And then next to her . . .
- MU: Waitress.
- MK: Is a waitress.
- MU: And this one, too, waitress.
- MK: So you had one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, at least a dozen people working at Kewalo Inn. Those days, I don't know if you know because you're working in the back washing dishes, but what kind of food did . . .
- MU: American food.
- MK: What kind though?
- MU: Stew, curry, steak, all that.
- MK: What was real popular over there?
- MU: Oh, fish.
- MK: Fish.
- MU: They popular, the seafood, because they figure, Kewalo Inn, Kewalo Basin. They try to make fish.
- MK: What kind of fish dishes did . . .
- MU: Mahimahi. I used to clean mahimahi myself. I used to clean mahimahi.
- MK: You cleaned fish at Kewalo Inn?
- MU: Yeah.
- MK: So, more than dishwasher then.
- MU: Well, little bit. That time, come up over there, little bit.
- MK: So you did dishwasher first, then what did you do?
- MU: Pantry boy, cook helper, and then I know how to make pie.
- MK: So, when you say, like, pantry boy, what does a pantry boy do?
- MU: Make salad. Any kind salad they ask you, potato salad, macaroni salad, all kind. You know, you make, that's a pantry job, boy.

MK: And then, cook's helper, what did you do?

MU: What they say, "Do this," fry mostly like hamburger sandwich, or veal cutlet. Anything what they order, I make, I fry cook. Fry cook, me.

MK: And then, those days, the cooks, in addition to the fish, what other things were Kewalo Inn noted for? What did people come there for?

MU: Get stew, roast beef, everything, all kind American food. Everything, they can make. Mostly mahimahi . . .

MK: Seafood then.

MU: Seafood is the. . . .

MK: And then the pies, what kind of pies were they known for?

MU: Custard pie, apple pie, pumpkin pie. I did all pies over there.

AU: He was expert on it.

MK: You got good at the pies?

AU: He was popular.

MU: I'm expert at pies. Someday I make custard pie for you.

(Laughter)

MK: Oh! Okay. And then, so you got a little bit higher and higher, yeah. Dishwasher, and then all that time when you were getting higher and higher, how did you learn each job?

MU: Watch. Nobody teach you.

MK: They don't teach you. You just watch.

MU: Watch. Nobody will teach you, and then, no more measurement. Just tell, "You put this, how much." No. There's no such thing like that or measurement. You do it yourself, with the hand. Even I make custard pie, I mean, pie dough, never measure. Never. Too much flour, you put Crisco inside. Crisco, too much Crisco, you put (water). We never measure because we don't know how to read that time. The old folks came from Okinawa, they don't know how to write and read.

MK: I was wondering, you learned from the other people, the cook, the baker, the pantry boy before you. But do you know where these guys learned? You learned and you watched, yeah? Where did they learn how to do this?

MU: No, they learn from dishwasher, too.

MK: They started from dishwasher and move up.

MU: Yeah, all, they come up from dishwasher. And then, you learn everything, you cook, yourself, cook. You cook your stew, anything that you can do. Customer eating your

food, then you want to make business. You want to make business, but you got to get capital. That's why you get a lot of tightening up yourself. You can save money because you no eat at home. You work eleven hours a day, you know. You can save because mostly if you go out to eat, expensive, but restaurant people we don't have to eat. I mean, you don't have to spend money on the food. That's why if you want to save money, you can because, you know. Free . . .

MK: Your meals are provided, yeah?

MU: Yeah.

MK: I was wondering, when you started as a dishwasher, what was your pay?

MU: Forty dollars a month. I was rich. Forty dollars. Nineteen thirty-one depression, I still get hard time had food on the table because you know, my father no more work, my sister get seven, eight dollars a week. So when I start to work forty dollars a week . . .

AU: For the month.

MU: Forty dollars month, I mean, I was rich, and I give my father thirty-five dollars a month. Because, I no need money. I was sleeping at Kewalo Inn, behind bedroom, with Wally and Albert, they was sleeping together.

MK: Wally Teruya, Albert Teruya, and you. You folks also slept at Kewalo Inn in the back.

MU: Yeah. We don't have houses. Of course—that's why I need not more than five dollars because I don't smoke. You need more than five dollars, maybe you need five dollars, but otherwise, you no spend money. I found that I start to work, I never become poor.

MK: From that time, forty dollars a month, you keep five, but thirty-five dollars you gave to your father. And those days, where was your father living?

MU: Oh, Pālama. He live in one apartment, I mean, not apartment. Today I don't know what you call that. Shack or what, I don't know. A living quarter, anyhow.

MK: And your father, that time, was he working?

MU: No.

MK: And then, how about your brother (Kotaro) that time? When you worked Kewalo Inn, what was he doing?

MU: He was working hotels. Waiter.

MK: He was a waiter at a hotel. And then, I was wondering, you worked in the back of the restaurant, dishwasher, pantry boy, cook's helper, baker, how come you didn't work in the front, the waiter side?

MU: I don't know how to talk. I don't know how to talk, because I told you, I went school, but just I didn't learn in school. And plus that, I don't know how to write, I don't know how to talk. That's why, I stay in the kitchen. That's all I can do, kitchen because. . .

MK: And then, who got better pay, the people in the back or the waiters?

- MU: Oh, cook got better pay.
- MK: Cook, better pay. So at the end, after you move up, up, up at Kewalo Inn, what was your pay?
- MU: I think was fifty-five dollars, I think.
- MK: You got fifty-five dollars.
- MU: Yeah, that time was big money because city and county worker, about sixty dollars that time. They used to support the family with sixty dollars, that time.
- MK: So for you it was good pay.
- MU: Oh yeah. I didn't come poor that time.
- MK: Those days, Albert is young, Wallace is young, you were young. You weren't married then, so what did you folks do for fun?
- MU: Nothing. (AU and MK laugh.) Nothing. We just survive.
- MK: How many hours were you working?
- MU: Eleven hours a day, every day, three hundred sixty-five days [a year]. No more Sunday off—I mean, no holiday off. Three hundred sixty-five days.
- MK: When were the real slow times every day and busy times every day?
- MU: Because we worked six [AM] to two [PM]. If you cook, six to two, you work. And then here, after two o'clock, few people come in. Again, five to eight [PM], we work from five to eight and then go home.
- MK: So what do you folks do in between?
- MU: Go sleep. Eleven hours you start (chuckles), sleep or lie down. Because you don't have pleasure. That time you get job, so you were happy with it. You don't go look for pleasure.
- MK: But you folks were Kewalo Inn, Kewalo Basin side. Did you folks go fishing or anything?
- MU: No, no more fishing pole yet, that time.
- MK: So you folks would just go take a nap or take break then. I know that in 1934 you went to Kapi'olani Grill. How did that happen?
- MU: The Uyehara, the owner, used to work for—not used to work used to come—something like part time. So he know me. He went over there, he tell me, "How about come work for me?"
- So, I tell him, "Okay." I tell him, "I get so much pay, you can pay me, okay." So I went go work over there.

MK: The owner of Kapi'olani Grill was . . .

MU: Saburo Takara and Kamado Uyebara.

MK: Teruya.

MU: Yeah, Saburo Teruya. [MU corrects himself.]

MK: And Kamado Uyebara. So they ask you to come work, how much did you get paid over there?

MU: Sixty dollars, I think.

(Laughter)

MK: How did the Kewalo Inn people feel when you were going to quit your job and go to another restaurant?

MU: Well, they try to stop me from going over there, but my mind is set. So, I no care what they do. If they raise, raise only five dollars, so I no care what they think.

MK: And then, so where was this Kapi'olani Grill?

MU: Next to Young Laundry.

MK: This Saburo Teruya and Kamado Uyebara, what kind of experience did they have in the restaurant business?

MU: Saburo Teruya established the Hibiscus Café.

MK: Later on.

MU: No, before. I think Hibiscus Café is second to the Oroku, number two.

MK: So Saburo Teruya had the Hibiscus Café before.

MU: Yeah, with I don't know the name of one more guy.

AU: Kina? No.

MK: But he was in partnership with somebody for Hibiscus Café? That was open about 1929 on Bethel Street.

MU: Yeah. I think so.

MK: So he had that experience already. How about Uyebara-san?

MU: No, Uyebara no experience. They lived nearby, they are good friends. I think they worked together maybe.

MK: And then when you started as the cook over there, who else worked over there?

MU: Mostly me and Uyebara. And then nighttime shift, one man was working.

- MK: And then the front side, waiters and waitresses?
- MU: Hard to remember, I don't know the name, but nice good working girls they had.
- MK: Those days how big was Kapi'olani Grill?
- MU: Oh, quite big. I think maybe sixty, seventy people go inside.
- MK: Oh.
- MU: Yeah, big, not small.
- MK: What was the Kapi'olani Grill known for? What were their specialties?
- MU: Nothing special. Ordinary American food, everybody enjoy.
- MK: So the food, was it the same like American Café, Kewalo Inn, about the same?
- MU: Yeah. Kapi'olani Grill. And then that (building) burn. Not the same one now.
- MK: So the original Kapi'olani Grill.
- MU: Same place, location, but not . . .
- MK: The building burned down.
- MU: Yeah, same name because they made upstairs, downstairs. Teruya own the place.
- MK: So when Kapi'olani Grill was opened in 1934, was it new?
- MU: Yeah, new. No, they had one house, but they fix it up, just like warehouse, but they fix that house and . . .
- AU: Make into restaurant.
- MU: Make into a restaurant.
- MK: It was a residence house or . . . ?
- MU: No, warehouse, I think. Yeah, any kind rubbish inside. Yeah, I fix it up.
- MK: That's a nice picture.
- MU: Yeah, that's the original, but today one upstairs, downstairs, you know.
- MK: Different.
- MU: Flamingo, now, yeah? I wonder if they changed it. Nagamine not there, Flamingo—that's why, I don't know.
- MK: I don't know what's there now. But, later on this Kapi'olani Grill location became Flamingo's.

MU: Yeah.

MK: I'm going to just turn the tape over, yeah?

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

MK: This is side two of session one.

We were just talking about Kapi'olani Grill that later on it became the Flamingo's location. And I was wondering since you were the cook there, you say didn't have specialties and same kind food as other place, but what did you think was real good that you made?

MU: I don't know.

(Laughter)

MK: What did a lot of people order?

MU: In restaurants, veal cutlet is the most popular. Hamburger steak, veal cutlet, stew, that's the most popular thing. Curry. That's all mostly.

AU: And chicken cutlet.

MU: Other things you made, but mostly, real popular is stew. Veal cutlet is popular. Even stew is same thing.

MK: When you cook the food, did you change the way you learned how to make it?

MU: No, I no change.

MK: So same way like . . .

MU: Kewalo Inn, yeah.

MK: And then, those days, do you kind of remember how much a whole meal would cost for somebody at Kapi'olani Grill?

MU: Thirty-five cents meal. Soup to nuts.

MK: The whole meal, soup to nuts . . .

MU: . . . thirty-five cents. But, waitress get one dollar a day, thirty dollars month.

MK: Kapi'olani Grill, what kind of customers did it have?

MU: Local people.

MK: Local people.

MU: Working people.

MK: So people in the neighborhood.

MU: Yeah, and they get big, nice parking, so if they get car, get the, you know.

MK: The local people that came, they came when they were working time, their lunch hour?

MU: Yeah, their lunch hour, that's why lunch, twelve o'clock, is busy.

MK: How about dinnertime?

MU: Dinnertime, everybody like eat dinner, they come down.

MK: Did families come?

MU: Yeah, must bring their family, yeah. I don't know too much about in front.

MK: Because you were in the back, yeah. And then, at this Kapi'olani Grill, did you have like *minarai* dishwasher?

MU: No. No more.

MK: All paid workers.

MU: No more such thing as *minarai*. *Minarai* is us because . . .

AU: Just came from Okinawa.

MK: But no more at Kapi'olani Grill.

MU: We pay, but we teach them how to wash dish. No problem there. No, not too many *minarai*, they had to live that's why.

MK: Ah, okay. Like you were saying Harry Uehara, he was strict. How about Saburo Teruya and Mr. Kamado Uyehara?

MU: No, they respect the people, those guys. They wasn't so strict like that—I never see anybody get scolding from him.

(Laughter)

MK: And then I know that later on—you were there six years, 1934 to 1940 you worked at Kapi'olani Grill. When you were there, were there other people cooking with you?

MU: Yeah. Two, three people were cooking with me.

MK: Cook with you. And then, in 1940 you moved to Lindy's Café. How come?

MU: Because the people over there, Lindy's Café, they all Portuguese old people running the place. So, I hear they selling the place. So if Portuguese people (can) run, I figure I can run it better because I cook, myself. They got to hire somebody to cook. So, we bought the place, \$5,000, but I didn't have \$5,000. So, I told them, me and my brother told,

"How much is down payment?" That's the main thing, down payment, see. It's \$2,500, so somehow—I didn't have \$2,500—somehow we borrow.

AU: From the relatives.

MU: Relatives. I had *tanomoshi*, but you had to take, that time, was *tanomoshi* all. Thirty dollars a month. So the relatives know I get *tanomoshi*. So they loan me some money. Not all, but some money. So we put the \$2,500, we bought the place. And meantime, we are experienced on restaurant, me and brother.

MK: Your brother, how much experience did he have?

MU: Waiter experience. Nothing kitchen. I get experience. So, we get along, the business build up and come busy. So, you see the one-year time, we celebrate ourselves, and then, here, war [World War II] came. Nineteen forty-one. Plenty servicemen, they (live at) park, at McCully, Makiki? I don't know.

AU: The park is still there.

MK: Makiki Park was a camp?

MU: So, they had plenty, but no more place for the soldiers. So get tents over there. They give us all their business. We (there) at right time, and then plenty defense worker, Pearl Harbor workers used to come our place. You know, over there, war defense. That's why, we did good.

MK: So, Lindy's Café, where was it located?

AU: Beretania and Ke'eaumoku [streets] corner.

MK: So Ke'eaumoku and . . .

AU: Beretania.

MK: . . . Beretania. And then, you had the military station nearby, camping nearby, and you had civilian defense workers. So it was busy.

AU: Good thing we extended the place. We added the garden outside.

MU: And then, war came, we did good.

MK: So, before the war started, how were you folks doing?

MU: We doing good. That's why before the war, this one.

MK: So you were doing okay in 1942.

MU: Yeah, 1940, '41.

MK: Those days, before the war, who were most of the customers, where did they come from?

MU: Oh, local people, defense workers.

MK: What did they come to eat mostly? Same thing?

MU: Same thing.

MK: Veal cutlet, stew, hamburger steak.

MU: Hamburger steak, yeah.

MK: And, you mentioned that your brother had the front-room experience, he was a waiter. So you mentioned that he had worked hotel restaurant as a waiter, did he work anyplace else before that?

MU: He work Kewalo Inn, hotel, I think he work here and there, I don't know.

MK: Oh, so he worked Kewalo Inn, hotel, here and there, different restaurants as a waiter. He had all the front-room experience, you had all the back-room experience, so a good partnership, two brothers. And, now this time you folks owned the business, you and your brother, what was hard about owning a restaurant? What kind of worries did you have?

MU: Nothing worry. Nothing special worry.

MK: How about managing your workers? Before you're only a worker, you don't have to scold or teach or take care of other people. Now that you're the owner . . .

MU: I try to take care of the working people. We appreciate the working people, that's how. Because you got to respect them, they respect you. That's why.

MK: Where did you get your workers for Lindy's?

MU: Newspaper.

MK: You put an ad for workers.

MU: Yeah, I think we . . .

AU: We had the bar, so we had bartender. Some, you know the guy, if they not working, if we had opening, we tell them come down, work.

MU: Oh, in the kitchen, talking about? Okay. The one I know.

AU: Okinawans. (Chuckles)

MK: So you hired people that you knew, some people you got through ads, some you knew if they weren't working, come over and work your place. And Mrs. Uyehara was saying that you had a bar, too. So, about how many tables did you folks have?

AU: We extended the place. After we bought the place . . .

MK: You folks remodeled and extended . . .

AU: Remodeled and put a garden outside.

MU: Extended. I think maybe . . .

- AU: We put lot of improvements. We get the big crowd, bartender, bouncer. It was really a . . .
- MK: So like maybe fifty tables?
- MU: No, not fifty tables, fifty people can sit down.
- MK: Fifty people can sit down.
- AU: All outside garden tables.
- MU: About fifty people can sit down.
- MK: You had outside tables, too?
- AU: We had umbrellas.
- MU: I think all together, fifty people. That's a lot of people, fifty.
- MK: That's a lot of people, not a small restaurant.
- MU: No.
- AU: Had the bar that . . .
- MK: You had a big bar.
- AU: So we did quite. . . . And what did you say about the December 7th . . .
- MK: What happened December 7th?
- MU: December 7th was so busy . . .
- AU: That morning.
- MU: . . . this morning, December 7th, so busy we struggling. And then, customer come . . .
- AU: I was a waitress in the front.
- MU: . . . tell me somebody attacked Pearl Harbor. How can be attack because I think war, got to declare war. But just attack? I never believe.
- AU: He was real mad with me. Because I keep on telling him.
- MU: Customer come telling me, a Pearl Harbor worker.
- AU: He didn't believe it.
- MU: Because I thought war, you got to declare war. So, my brother bring the radio together to work.
- AU: Couldn't get in touch with him because no more radio. Telephone was stopped.

- MU: As soon as brother came, so busy, I close the door, no need money. War, no need money. (Laughs) If war, no need money already. We don't know when we going die, so close the door.
- MK: You just closed up?
- AU: That day.
- MU: That day, I talking.
- MK: That day.
- MU: If war, what you need money for (chuckles)?
- MK: So that day, people coming, telling you folks that war started, your wife is telling you that war started . . .
- AU: He's all mad because he's all stuck in kitchen. The brother not there to help him.
- MK: And it was real busy that day.
- AU: Yeah, crazy.
- MK: And then so, you figured if war, no need money, so you closed the door that day.
- MU: (Laughs) Yeah.
- MK: And then the rest of the wartime was real busy, you said.
- MU: Yeah, defense workers, we get plenty defense workers. They get good pay.
- MK: And those days you folks were serving from what time to what time, wartime?
- MU: I think six [AM] to eight [PM].
- AU: Sundays we used to open from twelve. Wartime?
- MU: Wartime, yeah. Wartime only. We don't have too much beer that time. We get Primo and Royal, no more Mainland beer at that time. Already stopped. We get Primo beer and Royal beer, we had.
- AU: Twenty-five cents a bottle.
- MK: Twenty-five cents a bottle. And then you folks had blackouts, too.
- MU: Yeah, had blackouts.
- AU: Your brother was the block warden.
- MU: That's why that time, we closed at five o'clock, I think.
- MK: So (Kotaro)-*san* was the block warden? He would check to see that everybody is blacked out.

- MU: Yeah, because if get light, he used to tell them, "Get light, see."
- AU: Remember one time you said you went to Palace Theatre to see the movies and he wasn't supposed to be—curfew hour. Eight o'clock, he was outside and MPs [military police] . . .
- MU: Across the street you know, from here to next.
- MK: Across the street. You went across the street to . . .
- MU: Because Palace Theatre on the road, and then a service station, and us, see. Crossing the road, I think, he see me.
- AU: He went to the show, and by certain time, eight o'clock pass, was coming home. And MP . . .
- MK: Oh, and a MP stopped you because it was . . .
- AU: Pointing a gun at him. (Chuckles)
- MK: Pointing a gun at you after you went to the movie show.
- MU: Mm.
- AU: He told me the story. He was by himself, not with me.
- MK: I was wondering because you were born here, you were nisei, and your brother was born here, too, he was nisei. Were there any problems that you folks had during the war because you were Japanese?
- MU: So, no.
- MK: Even with the military?
- MU: Yeah.
- MK: No problems?
- MU: No problems.
- MK: Okay. And then, I was wondering, some restaurants said they had hard time when they had dock strike, later on after the war.
- MU: Yeah, hard to get rice.
- MK: How about you folks?
- MU: We get hard time, but I don't know how we got the rice though. Somehow, mostly only rice that time. Real shortage, rice.
- MK: But otherwise it was okay.
- MU: Yeah.

MK: So how was business with the strike?

MU: No, no, business, okay.

MK: Business was okay. I was wondering, those days at Lindy's Café, how did you folks get customers? Advertising, word-of-mouth?

MU: No. Name of food.

MK: Food was good.

MU: You know, restaurant business is always good. When you eat morning time, lunchtime come hungry, lunchtime is good, dinnertime hungry, dinnertime *pau*, morning time you like eat, hungry. That's the best business, best business, I think myself. If you sell cheap and good food, I think the restaurant going be success, anyplace. But if you cheat, no good.

That's the main thing, I think, [how] you treat the customer. Main thing they going come inside your restaurant. Important, you know. If they grumble and go home, you lose maybe some more customers if they tell anybody. You know? They pay cashier, say thank you, and go home, guarantee you'll come back.

MK: So, were you folks strict with the waitresses then?

AU: No.

MU: No. I respect the waitresses. They appreciate. We appreciate the working people. You got to appreciate that because they making money for you.

MK: Like Mrs. Uyehara was saying, it was like a family. The girls working in the front, you treated them like family, and you respected them. They're making money for you by working for you.

MU: Yeah, that's why, you got to respect them. That's why, restaurant is a good business for you.

AU: Hard work though.

MU: Hard work, day and night, because three times a day meal. That's why, no more education you always. . . . Today, Vietnamese or those guys mostly in restaurant because they know. They no more education, but restaurant hand work.

MK: So when you were like at Lindy's how many hours were you at the restaurant every day?

MU: About ten, eleven hours.

MK: Ten, eleven hours. How about (Kotaro)-*san*, your brother?

MU: About same because. . . .

AU: He come in and out.

MK: So, was your schedule just like when you were working the other places? You work long

time, then you have the break before dinner crowd, and then you work again.

MU: Yeah. But, I go Waikīkī, I work thirteen, fourteen hours sometimes. More than that. I come home eleven o'clock, ten o'clock [PM], get up five o'clock[AM].

MK: That's the Silver Surf time, yeah.

MU: Yeah, because—myself, now. Small restaurant.

MK: But yourself.

MU: Yeah, and with a lady helper.

MK: For today, I'm going to stop over here. I'm going to stop at Lindy's Café and the next time I come, we're just going to talk about Silver Surf. Because that's your own business and then that time I'm going to ask Mrs. Uyehara, too, because you used to come in as a relief worker. I'm going to stop it.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

MK: Just before we, a little while ago we were just talking off-tape about American Café's owner, and you were telling me that he was one of the first to have a restaurant, so what did he do for the *Orokun-chu*? You were telling me . . .

MU: He invite all the *Orokun-chu* dishwasher and then build up, waiter, he teach how to waiter. I think he was a waiter, you know, somehow. I don't know too much about history about him. But I think he was a waiter because he know how to talk English. That's why he was in front always because customer got to talk—oh, everybody got to talk English, nobody talk Japanese over there because it's Downtown.

MK: So, he invited other *Orokun-chu* to come work over there, and then *minarai*, learn, and then I know that some of you, later on, you folks started your own business.

MU: Yeah.

MK: What did he feel or think about you folks setting up your own businesses?

MU: I think he was happy, too, because *Orokun-chu* making their own business, yeah. That I don't know too good, but I think he was supposed to be happy because he's not the kind inside dirty kind [of] man was. He's a nice man.

MK: He was a nice man.

MU: Yeah, nice man. That's why he bring everybody, make start, learn how to, make them cook. Inside there, all *Orokun-chu* working. *Orokun-chu* people work inside.

MK: Okay, now I'm going to stop.

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape No. 40-19-2-02

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Masao Uyebara (MU) and Asae Uyebara (AU)

Honolulu, O'ahu

October 24, 2002

BY: Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto (MK)

MK: This is an interview with Mr. Masao Uyebara and Mrs. Asae Uyebara at their home in Honolulu, O'ahu on October 24, 2002. The interviewer is Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto.

Today we're going to continue the interview by talking about Silver Surf.

MU: I *wen* go inside Silver Surf, yeah.

MK: And so, you had Silver Surf from 1954 to 1970, and how come you went to Silver Surf?

MU: We don't make money with Lindy's Café, so I plan to split from brother and plan to go Mainland to study what I can do over there. I had children that time, so I got to survive. So, I went to Mainland, I stay one month, flew all around. I don't have education, don't know anything. So hard to get working people over there, for me. You go from the stranger place, that's the reason, not over here. So, I stay over there, go horse race, gamble.

AU: (Chuckles) New York.

MU: New York. Only stay New York couple of days. And I like to know what is Pullman train. So, from New York, I went Pullman train, the kind [of train where] you can sleep, like take two nights or something like that. Then, I like see Las Vegas, what kind place it is. So I stop Las Vegas from Chicago, and then I stay over there. This Las Vegas is not for me. So, I take Greyhound bus back to Los Angeles and come home. And then, I come here. Insurance man say, "Waikīkī got two more restaurant for sale, you like buy?"

"Okay. Where?"

"Silver Surf Fountain."

Okay, I went over there interview, they say, \$9,000, okay. They wasn't making money. I figure, if I do, I think I can get my salary maybe. That's what I think. Owner of the restaurant's daughter is working over there (Mrs. Ozaki,) so I brought them, couple of guys, together. So, they stayed [as employees] until I quit, too.

MK: Who were the people working there? You have Ozaki-san (Mrs. Ozaki), who else was there?

AU: Fumiko Suzuki.

MU: I forgot all the name.

MK: That's okay.

MK: And then, where was Silver Surf?

MU: 'Ōhūa Avenue and Kalākāua [Avenue] on the corner.

AU: Right across the Aoki . . .

MU: Across the Aoki Store.

MK: Just across from the Aoki Store?

MU: Yeah, used to be Aoki Store before, old days. Not anymore, but.

MK: And then, so those days, what kind of businesses were nearby Silver Surf? What was nearby? Aoki Store across the street, what else?

MU: Blue Ocean [restaurant].

MK: Blue Ocean.

MU: Our building get four stores. I get one corner, next laundry, one Chinese restaurant, next one is just like some bakery or something like that.

MK: And then, how about the residences, the homes nearby?

MU: No, no residences. Was way behind, one block behind they have. But, most of my customer is working people, hotel worker, and the guy who come Waikīkī swimming.

AU: Beachboys. Across had the tables with all these people playing cards on the beach.

MU: If you sell cheap and you no cheat them, I think restaurant is good business. Everybody got to eat. Hungry three times a day.

MK: So your customers were mostly the workers, hotel workers, beachboys, the people who were playing cards across the street at the beach . . .

AU: And the people that living behind . . .

MU: And then, plenty children come from swimming. Those guys come buy soda.

AU: I tell you, we had these wrestlers—maybe you don't know the name of—they were popular. They used to come up . . .

MU: Because one block down you get apartments.

AU: And then, Zulu, the "Hawai'i Five-O," the actor.

MU: Sometimes we get spareribs.

- AU: Pork sparerib was his favorite thing.
- MU: (Chuckles) He know what day we get spareribs, so he used to come that day.
- MK: So Zulu, the actor, used to come for the pork spareribs at your restaurant.
- AU: Yeah.
- MU: That's why small fountain, but they satisfied [with] lunch, they satisfied [with] dinner.
- AU: I have this menu. I have to make.
- MK: Oh, maybe you can read the items. The menu was extensive.
- AU: No, those days this was the menu. I used to type the menu.
- MK: [Reading menu.] So you had choice of fruit cocktail or salad, drinks and desserts.
- AU: All comes with.
- MK: Coffee, pie. So you had like hamburger steak with gravy, veal cutlet with gravy, chopped steak, fried shrimp, fried *mahimahi*, fried liver and bacon, teriyaki beef, pork chop, T-bone steak.
- AU: This is the everyday things that's in the menu, but this is a special that we have, one different [entree]. You know, because we have to make.
- MK: So you have your items that were offered every day, the ones that I just read, and then you had special of the day like roast turkey with cranberry sauce, pork sparerib, roast pork with apple sauce, Swiss steak, beef stew, curry, fresh corned beef cabbage, stuffed cabbage, spaghetti, and you also had *saimin*, wonton *min*.
- AU: These are the desserts.
- MK: Oh, apple pie, pumpkin pie, custard pie, coconut cream pie, banana cream pie, and lemon (meringue) pie.
- AU: This every day, one different, not all the same one time. You know what I mean.
- MK: So for the pies you offered like one . . .
- AU: We had apple, (custard,) and pumpkin every day.
- MU: Yeah. Pumpkin every day, that's regular.
- AU: Yeah, but these are specials, sometimes we used to have.
- MK: Coconut cream, banana cream, lemon (meringue) were the specials.
- MU: Yeah.
- MK: So your menu was quite large.

- AU: Yeah.
- MK: And I notice Silver Surf was a fountain, so what fountain drinks did you folks have?
- MU: We had only, I think, eleven or twelve [seats] on the counter?
- MK: The signs on the top.
- MU: And then we had three tables.
- MK: So eleven or twelve seats at the counter, and then three tables.
- MU: Yeah.
- AU: Four or three, something like that.
- MK: Three or four tables. How many people sit at the table?
- AU: Four.
- MU: One, four; one, six, I think can sit down.
- MK: And you had at least two workers. You had Ozaki-san (Mrs. Ozaki) and . . .
- MU: No, we had plenty workers.
- AU: Much more, many more.
- MU: Because we get down the beach, we open fourteen or fifteen hours. So you get . . .
- AU: We had more than ten, yeah?
- MK: More than ten workers.
- MU: Yeah, I think, because you get the shift. Some guys work only five days. Most work five days. We open 364 days.
- AU: But, waitress in the front was always two, but behind, kitchen, cook.
- MU: Two.
- AU: Two cooks, dishwasher. Shifts coming in.
- MK: How many shifts of workers did you have?
- MU: Two shifts, (three shifts).
- MK: What was one shift, what's the hours?
- MU: Six [A.M.] to two [P.M.], and then two to . . .
- MK: Two to past dinner time, (4:30 to closing).

MU: Closing about nine-thirty, nine o'clock.

MK: Those days, you had the food and the fountain, what were your specialties? The ones that people came for.

AU: We had lots of these Japan Airlines [employees] coming in because of (Mrs.) Ozaki. (She) comes from Japan. They was just like a family, they used to come, just like a family. And these people used to like teriyaki steak with the hot sauce. They would put the hot sauce on the teriyaki and that was the specialty. I tell you. Every time they come, oh, they used to just love that.

MU: But, in restaurant business, you have to watch [when] the dishes come back. Anytime [customers] no eat, you got to taste them.

AU: He used to be like that, he wants to see why.

MU: And when I bought the place, I used to tell the girls, if can't eat, throw away. That's what the most important. To satisfy customers, you got to know if anything make them [send food] back, throw away. And then, serve what you can eat. Don't serve what you don't eat. No, that's bad. Very important, you know. Once you lose customer, next time no come back, you know.

AU: This is very important.

MU: That's why, serve what you can eat, not serve what you no can eat. No, no.

MK: And then if a plate came back and you notice they didn't eat, you would kind of check to find out.

MU: I eat myself to see what happened, why. That's the main thing, that's why.

MK: And then I noticed this menu is kind of big. How did you learn to make all of these things?

MU: While you dishwasher, you learn how to cook. You watching, every time, even pie, nobody teach me how to make pie. You always watch.

MK: So when you watch and you make, did you make many mistakes in the beginning?

MU: Oh yeah, you do plenty mistakes. But, what you do, you going throw away. You go hide from the boss, you throw away.

(Laughter)

MK: Did you try at home?

MU: No, never.

MK: You never tried at home.

MU: I no more home.

AU: What do you mean, no more home?

- MK: Oh, when you were real young time?
- MU: Yeah. No more home. We eat over there, so we never go restaurant, too. We open 364 days.
- MK: So, when you had your own restaurant, who was the main cook?
- MU: Me. I'm the main cook, I order everything.
- AU: Without him, (Mrs.) Ozaki folks was just frying things.
- MU: They learn from me, I teach them how to do, what to do.
- MK: So, did you stay at the restaurant fourteen, fifteen hours a day?
- MU: No, I come home, two [P.M.] to five [P.M.].
- AU: Because he already makes all these things for the day. One special.
- MU: And then I serve customer breakfast, breakfast is the best making-money business. Eggs, cheap yeah. How much they selling? Ham and egg, how much cost? Hotcake, baking powder. You try to figure actually how much it costs, you know what I mean? Ham and eggs, they charging two dollars, three. The egg will cost you ten cents. I don't know [about] today. Today, how much one egg?
- MK: So the breakfast was the big moneymaker because the items are cheap to make.
- AU: We only had ham and eggs, bacon, hotcakes.
- MU: Yeah. That's why hotcake, making money, too, because making profit.
- MK: To make your menu interesting for the customers, did you ever go to other restaurants and try to get ideas?
- MU: No. Because, some they get fancy kind. I don't know how to make. And then, you make fancy, people don't know, too.
- AU: They don't know what they eating.
- MU: They don't know, too. These hotel, they don't know how. Ours is simple. You know, just regular. That's how we learn, too, anyhow, you know. We don't know nothing.
- MK: You kept it kind of simple.
- MU: Yeah.
- AU: Really, really simple.
- MK: Those days, your workers, how much did you pay them?
- MU: Minimum hour. Of course, the kitchen kind, dishwasher, I got to pay more. But waitress. But they no more (much) tip at that time. Yeah, that time no more tip (like now).

- AU: Not like now.
- MU: Yeah, they don't have tip (like now).
- AU: We had to go back three times. First we go put the fruit or salad, then we get the main dish, then we have to go back to ask the drinks, and then dessert. I forgot that part about tips.
- MK: But hardly any tip in those days.
- AU: Yeah, no.
- MU: Sometimes they put ten cents. That means that they good.
- AU: Silver Surf, maybe quarter.
- MU: Sometimes they used to give ten cents.
- AU: About that time, though, the later part, was getting better.
- MK: How important were tourists for your business?
- AU: No tourists.
- MK: No tourists over there.
- MU: Tourists, no. When they pass my place, tourists no come because mine is a small place.
- AU: They look inside, and it's small.
- MU: Yeah. One day, one car, some tourists came down. We tell the waitress, the bus driver of the tour tell, "That's the good place to eat," he said. Said, "Good eat over there," this place, point the place. So the customers, they came.
- AU: Somebody recommended.
- MU: Bus driver recommend. They used to be local people that's why, they used to come eat my place.
- MK: So did the local people come from outside of Waikīkī, too?
- MU: No, sometimes they come our place, but mostly working people.
- MK: Mostly working people, yeah?
- MU: Yeah.
- AU: Mostly it's regular customers. We know all of them and it's really like a family, as I said. All mostly, *no*?
- MK: So the customers, you knew by name?
- MU: Yeah.

- AU: Family-like. Real—every day, they come. They come . . .
- MU: Because you go anyplace that have to eat, they have to eat over there. So, you go anyplace more expensive, we are cheap, most simple way. That's why it used to be sometimes line up.
- AU: Oh yeah, we were so busy.
- MU: Waiting for the table.
- AU: In fact, there's one customer that used to play, used to have a table by the beachside. And they used to come in. Today, when we go to Vegas every New Year, we see him and his wife [who] was working our place. Remember Linda? She used to work our place, that's how they got together.
- MK: Oh!
- AU: They go every year and we're there, too. And he always tell, "Masa, you remember the time . . ." He start talking about it.
- MK: And so, your restaurant then was basically food and fountain drinks, fountain items. How about like, did you folks have a jukebox or anything like that?
- MU: Yeah, we have a jukebox.
- AU: We had a jukebox.
- MU: We rent (the jukebox). They give us percentage.
- AU: They'll come to change the record.
- MK: Since you had the Japan Airlines workers, did you folks have Japanese music in your jukebox?
- MU: No.
- MK: All American.
- AU: They'll come and put in, we never did say anything. They'll always put that.
- MK: And then, you were like the cook. And Mrs. Uyehara was . . .
- MU: Relief.
- MK: Relief worker.
- AU: Substitute.
- MK: Substitute worker.
- AU: And then I used to make the menu every day. And then whenever they short of—we had this big automatic ice machine. That's for the drinks. Cokes and everything. A lot of times we so busy from the hotel work coming in . . .

MK: Construction.

AU: We'll run out of the ice maker, so I had to go buy the ice. I'll go down to the ice—where was that?

MU: Kaka'ako.

AU: Kaka'ako.

MU: Yeah, they got the place for make ice.

AU: And then I had to go buy bag of ice because the machine wasn't giving enough. So I would go back and go sometimes took two, three times to go drive down and go get the ice. We were so crazy, when the hotel work coming up.

MK: Was it because of the construction workers you were busy?

MU: Yeah, plenty construction. You know the Aoki Store over there, that's the place coming up (also known as Hawaiian Regent Hotel).

AU: We were there, at that time, big hotels.

MU: That's why, when they heard I was going to retire, they say, "He make so much money."

(Laughter)

AU: We were very crazy. So I used to drive down to get the things.

MK: Whatever they ran out of, you would go out and get.

AU: I would go out and get.

MU: I tell her to go out and get for me.

AU: I used to go out get the things. So I wasn't a real worker. I was a person who would go.

MK: The extra hand.

AU: Yeah.

MU: Relief.

MK: And you know, I was wondering, those days, did you folks have parking?

MU: No parking.

MK: So just walk-in trade, then?

MU: Yeah.

MK: Everybody came on foot to your . . .

MU: On the street get parking on 'Ōhūa Avenue.

- MK: Those days, who were your competitors? Where else could people go to eat around there?
- MU: Get Blue Ocean, just . . .
- MK: Blue Ocean.
- MU: Get two chop suey. Same building, chop suey.
- AU: But they went out of business.
- MK: They went out of business?
- AU: How many people changed after that?
- MK: But there was another restaurant and Blue Ocean Inn.
- MU: Yeah.
- MK: Those days, it was only Blue Ocean Inn, or the chop suey place, or this other restaurant nearby.
- MU: Blue Ocean get tables, nice, big place. But plenty customer come from Blue Ocean to our place. Cheap, that's why.
- MK: How about the food? Same kind food?
- MU: Yeah, almost the same kind, American food. They come up from the dishwasher, too, those guys. Agena and them.
- AU: Who? Where, Blue Ocean?
- MU: Yeah.
- MK: Agena, yeah.
- MU: I don't know him well, but . . .
- AU: You remember what his name is. That's good. (MU laughs.)
- MK: Yeah. And then, those days did you advertise?
- MU: No, no advertising, no.
- MK: How did people know about your restaurant?
- MU: That's why I bought the place. They had customers.
- MK: They already had customers.
- MU: Yeah. That's why, just improve. Try to improve, if you serve cheap, good food, they come back.

- MK: And then you were saying that that place was real family-like, the workers stayed there long time, they're just like family, and then the customers you knew them by name and everything.
- AU: Of course, not everybody, but then yeah—There was Charlie and all those people used to come in, joking. We were just like a family.
- MK: So, you folks used to talk story and everything?
- AU: Yeah. Oh yes, yes.
- MK: You, too? You came out from the kitchen?
- MU: No, no.
- AU: Of course, you did. You were friends, they used to know him, Masa.
- MU: I know them, yeah. Not—working time you cannot, because I'm the cook.
- AU: No, but you can see the people.
- MU: I can see. I can watch—my place so small. I can watch just what their expression. I watch, you know.
- MK: You can see. And so the customers can see him, too, in the back.
- MU: Yeah. Over there, they sitting down.
- AU: It wasn't a real, that was just, you know. So take in everything. He was just talking.
- MK: So you could shout from the kitchen and talk with the customers.
- MU: Yeah, I can watch. "Hey, that place not served yet?"
- AU: He can be watching you. Telling the waitress, "Hey . . ."
- MK: "Oh, you didn't serve yet?" (Chuckles)
- AU: Oh, yes. He can see all that. And then, kitchen is right there by the counter that person can sit here, talking to each other.
- MU: That's why, good place for one-man boss. I can watch everything.
- AU: In fact, Japan Airlines people just come in. Just make family-like. There was a—I don't know whether I told you—but the news came on. One Japan . . .
- MK: Japanese broadcasting company came in?
- AU: Yeah, came and he was taking picture of what these airline people are eating. So there was one photographer, with a big . . .
- MK: Big camera.

MU: And what kind food they was eating.

AU: So the customers sitting down and they had to ask us permission. We say, "Oh yeah, go ahead." And then, a few days or a few weeks later, one of the Japan Airlines [employees] came and said, "You know, on the news in Japan came out in the TV." They wanted to know where all these Japan Airlines people are having their, you know.

MK: Their meals?

AU: Yeah. in there. So, "You two came up the TV."

I said, "What!"

MK: Oh, my goodness. You folks were known in Japan then. (Chuckles)

AU: One of them Japan Airlines customers said, "You know how you folks came out on the TV." Oh, maybe that's the time that that guy was taking that pictures. So that was—we were just very. . . . We used to take them around Hanauma Bay. The workers had a lot of gifts from Japan Airlines guys, who would bring Tokyo Tower [souvenirs], or *nani*, *kuma* you know that bear with that fish.

MK: Oh, the carved *kuma*. Yeah.

AU: Yeah, so we had lots of those things because they appreciated what we had done for them. We're all friends.

MK: And then, your workers, I know some restaurants, the owners and the workers would have get-togethers, they would go do something together. How about your place?

AU: We never did.

MK: So on the job you folks worked together.

AU: Right, and sometimes (my nieces) while they going school, in between, they'll come and help.

MU: I used to pay them.

AU: Yeah, school *da kine*.

MK: So part-time . . .

AU: Yeah.

MK: . . . your nieces would come and work.

AU: And during that parade time like that, we were so busy. They'll come and . . .

MK: That would be like Aloha Week parade?

MU: Yeah, oh, very busy. *Da kine* time, busy.

MK: So, your nieces were at the restaurant that part-time. Did they work after school?

MU: Yeah after school.

MK: So they helped at the restaurant.

AU: Yeah, they did sometimes in between. Like only . . .

MK: How about other relatives, did they also or just the nieces?

MU: (My daughter helped.)

[Microphone falls. Taping interrupted, then resumes.]

MK: I'll put this [microphone] back. It just slipped out. And then, so like I know that in 1970 you folks stopped Silver Surf. What did you do in 1970? How come?

AU: We sold it.

MU: No, wait, I get tired.

MK: So you were saying you got tired.

MU: I got tired. Just in time, somebody like buy the place. "You like sell the place," he tell.

"You like buy, go buy."

AU: (Laughs) It's just like that.

MU: You see? So I tell him, "Okay, you like buy?" I don't tell him for how much. "One-year earning, you go see my bookkeeper." You know, you pay tax, and you get bookkeeper. "So if you like buy with the price, go ahead, one-year earning, only so much. I tell him. "Buy 'em." That's what they decide. And so, I was tired so he like to, go ahead. One-year earning just. I bought the place \$9,000. I used to make almost fifty thousand dollars, so if he like buy it, go ahead, I told him.

MK: So who bought the place?

AU: Arakawa.

MK: Arakawa? And how long did they continue?

MU: I don't know how long.

AU: No too long because he didn't have business experience. He was a contractor.

MU: Yeah, he's a contractor. (He has) no more restaurant experience. Just because I make money, I make good business. He figure you hire somebody, it's the same thing.

MK: He thought he could, but . . .

MU: Yeah, he didn't make money. That, I don't know.

AU: He sold it.

MK: Did you miss the business when you sold?

MU: No.

AU: After that we took a trip, the family.

MK: You took the whole family on a trip.

AU: Hokkaido.

MU: Hokkaido to Hong Kong.

AU: Okinawa.

MK: Oh, all over.

MU: Okinawa.

MK: Thirty-day trip.

MU: Yeah, every day different hotel. And then to Hong Kong.

MK: Oh my goodness. So, you retired and you sold your business and went on a trip.

AU: And he start playing golf with his friends.

MK: And then you golf with your friends.

MU: Yeah, golf with the friends.

MK: I was wondering, you have a son and a daughter, you have children, a son and a daughter. Would you want your children to be in the restaurant business?

AU: No, no, no. (Chuckles).

MU: You don't need education to go into restaurant, common sense you need in the restaurant business. Education, I think you can do better job, I think anyplace. Better kind job, I'm talking. That's what I think.

AU: He always forcing them to get an education at an university or a college.

MK: So you wouldn't want them to go . . .

AU: No.

MK: . . . into the restaurant business.

MU: Up to them.

(Laughter)

But they no like because I worked day and night to make money, survive. I don't think—you know. . . .

AU: In fact, my daughter always says, "Dad, you're lucky that you stayed, you know, you are able to still enjoy yourself." People thought he was sick that's why he's giving up.

MU: Thirty-two years, thirty-three years now? I don't know.

MK: Yeah.

AU: Fifty-four?

MK: You retired early. Fifty-four.

MU: Fifty-four. Today is what? I mean, eighty-six. Hard to believe.

MK: And then, Mrs. Uyehara, you worked at Silver Surf as a relief worker doing all these errands. Before that, what experience did you have in the restaurant business?

AU: Waitress. I was working for Star Grill. I start.

MK: How about, earlier you were telling me that you were born in 'Ōla'a, and then you lost your mom when you were about six or seven years old. And then later on about 1937 you came to Honolulu.

AU: Right.

MK: So what did you do in the beginning when you first came to Honolulu?

AU: When I first came I went to my uncle's place, which I didn't even know them. I wasn't comfortable because, even if it's an uncle. So, I start looking for a job. I thought, now, I had to get out of here, so I start looking and I found a job in a *Haole* house.

[Taping interrupted, then resumes.]

AU: I worked as a housemaid where I can stay. I didn't have to bother with my relative. I worked over there and I used to go home. When I went back, my sister's friend was going to come out to Honolulu. And my father . . .

MK: Chiyoko-san?

AU: Yeah, and my father, too, he didn't want me to stay. No, I'm all mixed up. Anyway, I came with her, and I quit the housemaid, and I lived in Pālama with her. And then, I start working in pineapple. That's when the summertime was the pineapple packing.

MK: Packer.

AU: Dole Pineapple. And I worked over there for a few times when they were season, and I got laid off. So then I start working tuna factory, that was at Kaka'ako. I worked over there for *chōtto*, no. After that, I had to look for job and I didn't know what to do, so I start going into the restaurant. I started with Hibiscus Café.

MK: How did you get the job at Hibiscus Café?

AU: I don't know. It's just like *minarai*, too. I didn't know anything about restaurant and I really suffered. I can never forget, my feet was all blistered. I'm not used to with the

shoes. You know, I came out from the island. I still think that was the most miserable thing, my blisters and cheap shoes I had on.

MK: At Hibiscus Café, where was that?

AU: That was on Bethel Street.

MU: Oroku.

AU: Oroku, yeah. Hibiscus.

MK: Yeah, this list says that from 1929 to 1940 [Hibiscus Cafe's owner] was Saburo Teruya, and then from 1940 to 1953 Yukichi Teruya.

AU: Oh, he did work. Nineteen thirty-seven Yukichi was working with me, I was working with him.

MU: Yeah, just working there.

AU: I just *chōtto*, I didn't . . .

MK: What was your job over there?

AU: Waitress.

MK: What did you do as waitress?

AU: Serve, waitress.

MK: Coming from 'Ōla'a, how did you learn to be a waitress?

AU: That time I didn't know anything, I just go as a helper. As I said, I can hardly walk with all my blisters. Oh, I tell you. So, I guess, I don't even know how much pay I had. I don't remember. Not too long, I stayed, and after that I went to Hawaiian Café. I worked in Hawaiian Café.

MU: Hawaiian Café Kina—I don't know.

AU: I don't know what his name was.

MK: Hawaiian Café . . .

AU: Was the one on Pauahi Street, I think.

MK: *Makai* 'Ewa corner, Pauahi and Fort Street?

AU: Right, right. Yes.

MK: And the owner was Seichi Takara?

MU: Takara is afterwards. Before that was. . . . Kina *daka*, I don't know . . .

MK: So Kina-san.

MU: Yeah.

AU: Maybe his first name is Kina. I don't know, he was a tall . . .

MU: Nagai they call.

AU: Yeah, they used to call him Nagai. I don't know.

MU: He's tall skinny man.

AU: He was tall and skinny man.

MK: Oh, okay.

AU: So, I don't know, but I worked over there *chōtto*, *no*.

MK: Nagai.

AU: That was his nickname, I think. Nagai means . . .

MK: "Long," yeah? And then so, how was Hawaiian Café, working there?

AU: Well, I worked there as a waitress again, and I remember when I was waitressing, my teacher from 'Ōla'a, Mr. Nakamura, he came in (laughs). He was my seventh-grade teacher, I remember that. And, of course, I served him. I didn't stay too long (in) that restaurant. And, how I went to Star Grill was this Kojiro Takara used to come in. He used to work in there.

MU: Part-time.

AU: Part-time. He used to come in lunch . . .

MU: He used to work Dairymen's.

MK: Dairymen's.

AU: Okay. He used to come in lunchtime to help, for lunch. He got to know me and he say, "I'm going to open my own, so come with me."

I said, "Okay."

So I quit over there and went to him, which the restaurant was in . . .

MU: That's my relation.

AU: I didn't know it was—I didn't know him at first, anyway. So, he got me into his restaurant. It was in at 'A'ala.

MU: In front 'A'ala Park, that.

MK: In front of 'A'ala Park?

AU: And the name of the place was Star Grill. So, I worked there as a waitress again. That time, you know, I used to type the menu for them, which I didn't go school much. I didn't have typing so I used to type with one finger and people were so surprised. I was so good at it.

MU: She can spell, anyway. (MK chuckles.)

AU: I used to just type their menus.

MK: But with one finger.

AU: One finger. I remember one person said, "Wow, I thought you was just going like that." That's how I was good at typing. At that time I was experienced already. While I was working over there, Uyehara-san, that *nani are? Ano . . .*

MU: You know, Times Supermarket from the, you know, uncle.

AU: The uncle. He used to come in part-time just to help him. That's Margie's father.

MK: He became a partner in Times Grill.

AU: He was the partnership with—yeah, he came as a partnership.

MK: Kame Uyehara.

AU: Kame, right. He used to come sometimes just to help Kojiro-*nisan*. He used to give me the menu (laughs).

MK: And type it out, yeah.

AU: So, we were kind of . . .

MK: So you were working at his relative's place, yeah, Kojiro Takara's a relative.

AU: His relative, which I didn't know. He used to come over there and that's how I met him [MU], I guess (laughs). And then, the Chiyoko that I used to live with, I used to live in Pālama with her together, and one day she came to get me, to walk home, and he was there. And he [MU] told me, "Oh, I know her." So we all walked home together that's how I got to know him better (laughs).

MK: So that's how you got to know your future husband.

AU: And then the three of us start walking together and talking about their time when they were living, and that's how he knew where I was living and we got to know each other.

MK: And then eventually, how come you quit Star Grill?

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

MK: Okay, I was just saying that I know that you quit Star Grill and you started working at Lindy's.

MU: Because I pulled her.

MK: You pulled her out.

MU: I making business, that's my sweetheart.

(Laughter)

AU: You! Everything coming out now. (Laughs)

MU: Come over to our place.

MK: So, you got Asae to leave Star Grill and then she started working at Lindy's with you and your brother?

MU: After that, we get . . .

MK: You got married in July 1940.

AU: Mm-hmm.

MK: What did you like about being a waitress? What did you like?

AU: I don't know. I been thinking that's the only thing I can make my living, I guess. I wasn't too . . .

MK: What was difficult about it? Anything difficult about being a waitress?

AU: About the time I was at Lindy's I was kind of used to already. First time was, I said, I would never get married to restaurant worker, that's all thing I was thinking at first when I start working. Because the waitress job, my feet was so sore. I was wearing the cheapest shoes, I tell you. But, when I was at Lindy's already I was—they were my brother-in-law and him and, I mean, we were doing fine.

MK: How about all the other workers that worked at Lindy's, how did you folks get the other workers for Lindy's?

AU: Through the ads, yeah?

MU: Yeah.

MK: Those were like just strangers.

AU: Yeah. Right, right. Strangers, mm-hmm.

MK: Now when you look back on your life where you worked, as a waitress, then you helped at your own business, what do you think of being in the restaurant business . . .?

AU: It was hard work, but we did it.

MU: We appreciate that job.

MK: Would you have your children go into the restaurant business?

AU: No, no, no. I would not. That's why we gave them education. We kept on telling, "Get your education, get into a white-collar job instead of this." And they know, too, how we worked.

MK: And then, Lindy's was owned by two brothers, you and your brother had it. And then, you folks worked as a family. What do you think about family businesses?

AU: It was okay, we get along. It was okay. The children, that's why they really appreciate us. Together, was good.

MK: What do you folks think about, how come so many *Orokun-chus* had restaurants? Why do you think?

MU: That's why I said, no more education, so only job you mostly can do. That's why, they making money, so you try got to make money, copy them.

AU: Copycats.

MU: That's why, all, they work. Hard working men, all.

AU: They really worked hard. The young ones know. They see their parents work like that.

MU: There were so much restaurants, but today, it's not. I don't think. No more.

AU: That's why, the young ones, they don't want to talk about restaurants.

MU: No more the life. You see. That's why (when) my own business, I close New Year's Day, I don't care what (others) say, I close. Even New Year's, I close.

AU: Christmas and New Year's.

MK: Christmas and New Year's you close?

MU: Christmas, I stay open (at the beginning).

MK: Only day in the whole year.

MU: One day [off], yeah. Three hundred sixty-four.

AU: That's why, after that the family, we are always traveling together, I'm telling you.

MU: That's the reason, I figure, take Saturday and Sunday off. I sell the place. Now, today, still today, I taking Sunday.

MK: So, it's good then.

AU: So family, we always together.

MU: At least we doing well, living, comfortable today.

MK: And the family is together, yeah? I'm going to end it over here.

END OF INTERVIEW

The Oroku, Okinawa Connection: Local-style Restaurants in Hawai'i

**Center for Oral History
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February 2004